DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 437 FL 026 451

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TITLE On-Site French Language and Quebec Culture Training for Business and Industry.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Business Communication; Business Education; Foreign Countries; *French; *Instructional Materials; *Languages for Special Purposes; *Learning Modules; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Workplace Literacy
IDENTIFIERS Quebec

ABSTRACT

This paper documents the development and field testing of pedagogical materials needed for six 5-week modules of French language instruction and introduction to Quebec's Francophone culture and business practices. Presently available materials produced in the United States too often focus on France and French business practices. Similarly, materials produced in Canada are geared to non-French speaking Canadians. Materials described herein were adapted and developed to be more appropriate to the American adult English speaker interested in learning about Quebecois French and business practices. The materials are also suitable for on-site training sessions involving students at different levels of proficiency. This curriculum and modules were designed to be used in the northern part of New York state near the Quebec border. Reviewed are instructional design, including determining foreign language and culture needs, the make-up of the class, and selecting instructional materials and the format of instruction. Six modules cover three topics: getting acquainted, getting around, and getting down to business (over three modules). Other topics considered include the following: work relevance as criterion for content selection, awareness of managerial conditioning, instructional approach. (KFT)

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On-site French Language and Quebec Culture Training for Business and Industry

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On-site French Language and Quebec Culture Training for Business and Industry

INTRODUCTION

The significant role of Quebec in the economic well being of the retail and tourism sectors of the North Country of upstate New York has long been recognized. In the past few years a number of important Quebec corporations have moved into the area such as Quebecor and Bombardier. This corporate influx has renewed interest in developing foreign language skills and intercultural awareness. Employees of these companies often have to communicate with managers and executives from Quebec who are more comfortable in French than English. They may also have to travel to factories and offices in Quebec where the language of business is French. Moreover, North Country employees may need to have developed French language skills in order to move into managerial positions in these companies. In all these situations, interaction can be improved by an awareness of the differences between American and Quebec cultures, an understanding of the values and priorities of the latter and knowledge of Quebec business practices.

This project focused on developing and field-testing the pedagogical materials needed for six five-week modules of French language instruction and introduction to Quebec culture and business practices. Commercially available materials produced in the US too often focus on France or French business practices. Those produced in Canada are geared to the needs of non-French speaking Canadians. Materials and teaching strategies were adapted or developed that are more appropriate to the American adult learner interested in Quebec French and business practices. These materials and strategies are also suitable for on-site training sessions involving students at different levels of

proficiency.

The curriculum and instructional materials developed through this project could be used in many corporate settings. The existence of on-site programs to develop French language and intercultural communication skills would help create a corps of employees, particularly at the managerial level, capable of functioning in francophone settings. The ability to converse in French, conduct business in French, and interact with counterparts in Quebec must be viewed as an essential component of the commercial training infrastructure of certain regions of the United States, such as the North Country. In these regions, such abilities will have a direct net effect on the economic sustainability and development of businesses.

We used the material developed through this project in pilot on-site instructional sessions at the Imperial Wallcoverings plant in Plattsburgh. Imperial Wallcoverings was a subsidiary of Collins and Aikman, Inc., then part of the Blackstone Group, with a plant in Sherbrooke (Quebec). A grant from the A.C. Walker Foundation partially supported this project.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Determining foreign language and culture needs

When designing a language and culture training program, the first step is to ascertain the foreign language and culture needs of the targeted group. Consequently, before beginning on-site instruction, we interviewed employees and managers of the Plattsburgh plant of Imperial Wallcoverings to determine their French language and Quebec culture needs and interests using the questionnaire below. The fifteen respondents indicated that they would like to be able to do the following in French:

15 Ask and answer simple questions.
15 Understand simple instructions and directions.
15 Understand simple statements about lodging, meals, transportation and buying.
14 Use short phrases of courtesy.
13 Make polite requests, invitations, introductions, apologies.
13 Read announcements of events, invitations or some headlines.
13 Understand informal conversations, spoken interviews, news items, reports of factual information or short speeches on familiar topics.
13 Share information and facts about people, places, events.
11 Read isolated words or standardizes messages.
8 Write short messages, take phone messages or brief summaries about work experiences.
8 Recount a past or future event.
8 Participate in a professional conversation.
7 Understand technical or professional discussions.
7 Read routine business letters, news items, social notices or simple technical material written for the general reader.
5 Read correspondence of non-routine nature, general reports, technical material in the professional field.
5 Supply (in writing) information on simple forms and documents.
4 Write social or informal business correspondence.
3 Write formal business letters, short research papers, statements of position on areas of special interest.
3 Counsel, persuade, negotiate.
2 Handle unfamiliar or emotionally charged situations.

The results of this survey indicated that the prospective participants were interested in acquiring "survival" skills in French, with primary focus on basic conversational protocols and topics. They considered understanding the spoken language just as, and often more, important than speaking it. These employees were not often going to be asked to read extensive material in French and even less often to write in French. These results were consistent with what we learned about their job situation. They were often expected to manage French-speaking employees at the Sherbrooke plant. They also had many occasions to travel to and throughout Quebec on business trips where speaking and understanding French would facilitate their interactions.

We assessed the current French language skills of the fifteen interested employees

using a written proficiency test developed at the University of Iowa. Ten had had no French instruction; five had had some French instruction. Ten completed the assessment instrument. Four scored at the second-semester-college French level. We had planned to assess their speaking ability using the oral proficiency interview (OPI) techniques developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Initial screening, however, indicated that the employees were too unsure of their speaking abilities to be willing to be interviewed. Not wanting them to begin with performance anxiety, we decided not to use the OPI.

Determining the Make-up of the Class

Next, we needed to find out who was going to be in the class. Seven employees actually began the program and completed a questionnaire. We needed to know what types of jobs the participants held, what was their level of education, if they had had any previous foreign language instruction or international experiences, what types of internationally focused activities they engaged in. The questionnaire yielded the following results:

Gender:	Male 7	Female	0
Age:	Average	46.3	

Job titles:
- General Manager Research and Engineering
- Manager of Engineering Services
- Production Supervisor
- Supervisor
- Wallpaper Plant Manager
- Paper Mill Plant Manager

Formal education:
- 2 High-school diploma
- 2 Some college (How many years? 2.35 average)
- 1 Associates degree
- 4 B.A./B.S.

0 Some graduate work (How many credits? _____)
0 M.A

Foreign language study:

1 No foreign language study
1 Latin 1-2 yrs. HS
1 Spanish 1-2 yrs. HS
4 French 1-2 yrs HS (2); 3-4 yrs. HS + 1-4 yrs. college (2)

Travel to a foreign country? 1 NO 6 YES
Canada, Mexico, Vietnam, Germany, Switzerland, Korea, Japan, Finland

Lived in a foreign country? 5 NO 2 YES
France, 5 years; Vietnam 8 months

How often do you	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Listen to foreign language radio		3	4
Watch foreign language TV		2	5
Watch subtitled movies		2	5
Read international news (in English)	1	6	

Why do you want to learn a foreign language? (Indicate all those that apply.)

7 Communicate in travel situations
7 Communicate in job-related situations
6 Communicate with non-English speakers in the U.S.
5 Understand other cultures
3 Read foreign books, newspapers, magazines
3 Improve English skills
2 Understand foreign radio, TV, films

Selecting Instructional Materials

We acquired and reviewed the instructional materials commercially available in the US and Quebec appropriate to this project. Unfortunately those produced in the US too often focus on France or French business practices. Those produced in Canada are geared to the needs of non-French speaking Canadians. Materials need to be developed that are appropriate to the American adult learner interested in Quebec French and business practices. These materials should also be suitable for on-site training sessions

involving students at different levels of proficiency.

We then designed the overall curriculum and the individual lessons of the modules. Initially we used sections of several first-year college textbooks, particularly *Allons-y* and *C'est ça*. They included audiotapes to accompany the printed exercises. The project director prepared additional materials. Beginning with the fifth module, we decided to use a basic text/workbook, *Le Français langue seconde par thèmes*, published in Quebec. At this point in the project, the associates had acquired enough linguistic confidence to begin using materials developed for adult non-francophone Canadians learning French.

TéléQuébec provided videos from several of its French-language television series dealing with Quebec culture and business practices. Segments of the series, *Tandem*, were adapted for instructional use and became part of the instructional materials. This series deals with the transformation of a family-owned bicycle manufacturing business into a modern corporation. It presents many of the problems typically encountered in business and factory settings. Study guides were prepared to make the series suitable for classroom use.

Selecting the Format of Instruction

This pilot project comprised six five-week modules with a two-week break between modules. We set task-oriented goals for each module. In addition, we drew up weekly objectives. We tailored the pacing of the modules and of the lessons within the modules to the needs and capacities of the participants. Our overall goal was to make the participants comfortable with the basic elements of French for oral and written communication in business contexts.

Each week we conducted two sixty-minute sessions. Initially classes met on

Mondays and Wednesdays at the lunch hour. Each session included general review, review of the assignment from the previous session, presentation of new material, and practice activities using the new material. Between Monday and Wednesday, we expected participants to review material and complete a short assignment (usually self-correcting). Between Wednesday and Monday, we expected them to review material, complete a longer written assignment, listen to audio tape and/or view video tape associated with the previous week's lesson. There was a two-week break between modules. During this time, we asked participants to review the material from the previous module and to watch an episode of *Tandem*. We gave them specific tasks to perform relating to this episode. These tasks helped them review the materials of the previous module and prepare for the next module. Beginning with the sixth module, classes met on Mondays and Wednesdays in the late afternoon.

In Module I we focused on general topics. With Module II we began introducing more work-specific topics and vocabulary. We decided that each participant would be asked to indicate specific work-related topics and vocabulary rubrics that they would like to see included. We decided also to ask them to bring printed materials and samples from their work situations. Bilingual materials from the plant in Sherbrooke would have been particularly helpful.

At the beginning, we avoided formalized assessment in an attempt to minimize the tension and anxiety that are inevitably associated with foreign language learning. We felt that a relaxed atmosphere had been created in the classroom and that participants were comfortable with the learning situation.

After the first module, we decided to slow the pace and to include more review of

materials than we had originally planned. Nonetheless, we made good progress. Class time passed very quickly and participants regularly stayed after class for extra mentoring or to have questions answered. We noticed differences in the learning rates of the participants. This was often due to the number of classes they could attend.

It was important to accommodate the work and vacation schedules of the participants. Indeed, flexibility and accommodation are crucial to our approach to on-site training. We encouraged associates who had been unable to participate to begin attending classes again. The instructor met with those who were interested in rejoining the class and offered to help them catch up to the others.

Associates in regular attendance obviously studied outside of formal training time, seeking opportunities to use their French, and were motivated to learn more. Also, given the increased confidence level, in general, they had clear opportunities to relate training material to describing and understanding actual work situations in French.

Attendance by about half of the five or six associates who continued the French training was irregular, while the other half attended with greater frequency. We accommodated the irregular schedules by providing a weekly review and catch-up session, usually on Friday during the lunch hour. The review sessions began in the second week of the module and continued one week after the module had ended. This review session was open to anyone in the class. One or two associates always took advantage of the review session. The purpose of the review session was to reinforce learning of material from prior modules and to help associates bridge the gaps caused by spotty attendance. These sessions were less formal than the regular twice-weekly sessions. The tutor spent considerable time working with associates on fundamentals. She answered questions,

practiced material presented during the regular sessions, and helped those who had missed classes to catch up. These sessions were practical and helpful. The tutor offered an extra session during the two-week hiatus between modules. This session focused on the worksheets that we had prepared to accompany the video.

Module V ended with the distribution of a learning exercise which associates had to complete on their own. The exercise had students researching vocabulary and expressions that might be used on the plant floor at the Sherbrooke operation. These tasks related to discovering French expressions dealing with safety issues and equipment.

In Module VI, the instructor introduced a lesson and exercise workbook, *Le français langue seconde par thèmes*. The book is geared principally to the adult non-French-speaking professional who needs to learn French for work and business. The book was a successful ingredient in this module, and the three associates who worked with it found it helpful and useful. It appeared to aid their listening comprehension and assimilation of grammatical and syntactic patterns. One associate, who has been the most linguistically challenged of the group, was helped substantially by the introduction of this accessible, easy-to-understand book.

Because the book is exercise-oriented and completely in French, the students had to make an effort to understand what they were reading in the exercise instructions. Furthermore, we assigned a great deal more self-paced work for the days in between training sessions, which students were expected to complete to the best of their ability and within the heavy demands on their time on the job.

A fieldtrip to Montreal, midway through the training program was a particularly successful activity. Four associates and two spouses met with one of the authors at the

plant in Plattsburgh for a warm-up session of vocabulary practice, role playing and presentation of some coping strategies. The associates then proceeded to Brossard where they met their instructor who took them into Montreal by public transportation. After that they were on their own for the rest of the day. They had certain tasks to complete in French, e.g., order a meal (and have the waiter/waitress sign a voucher indicating that they had ordered in French), send a postcard in French to Their instructor, take the subway to a site in Montreal and return with a souvenir. Everyone accomplished the tasks successfully and seemed to have enjoyed him or herself in the process. We had planned a second fieldtrip to the plant in Sherbrooke, but bad weather and the company's restructuring made it impossible.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Modular Approach with Specific Objectives

We feel that our modular approach with specific training objectives identified for each session as well as each module is particularly appropriate to the needs of the managerial participants. After class the associates often stayed in the room to discuss the afternoon's work. The discussion was quite quantitative, dealing with meeting quotas, runs, staggering shifts, tracking costs, etc. Discussions such as these have implications for foreign language instruction: an emphasis on counting, schedules, etc. as well as vocabulary of the trade. They also indicated to us that the more we could frame the learning process for the managers, the easier it was for them to understand the material. Furthermore, the discussions also showed us that the more the project directors shared their expectations and concerns for outcomes with the associates, the more they related to the need to produce results from module to module. This approach can translate across

most business settings where staff members are accustomed to seeing and expressing things in terms of outcomes. This confirmed our decision to develop a management-motivational approach to teaching foreign languages.

MODULE I: Getting acquainted

Tasks:
Greeting and taking leave in formal and informal settings
Giving and receiving personal information about
- nationality
- likes and dislikes
- profession
- possessions
- simple activities in the present
- appearance

Counting from 0-69

MODULE II: Getting around

Tasks:
Finding out where places and things are located
Giving simple commands
Talking about what will happen in the near future
Telling time
Describing one's schedule

MODULE III: Getting down to business

Goals:
Feel more comfortable with and sure of French-language concepts introduced in Modules I and II.
Be able to start talking confidently about schedules in terms of dates, times and places.
Relate schedules to activities, talking about destinations and planned actions.
Know how to make requests and give simple orders to others.

MODULES IV & V: More getting down to business.

Goals:
Describing products
Asking yes/no questions (inversion)
Use definite articles (*le, la, les*) and possessive adjectives
Be able to give and understand directions
Know how to talk about how long a trip or other task takes
Conjugate the verbs vouloir (to want) and espérer (to hope)

Be comfortable with a number of expressions using the verb avoir

MODULE VI

Goals:
Conjugating the "ir" verbs
Assimilating office vocabulary and workplace expressions
Making small talk about health, weather, etc.
Improving listening comprehension
Talking about means of conveyance
Traveling successfully in Québec

Work Relevance as Criterion for Content Selection

The more relevant the language experience is to the work world, the more information learners seem to retain. The *Tandem* episodes are extremely pertinent because the managers already understand the context. They are also particularly useful for visually-oriented learners. Those learners who interact more with francophones at the Sherbrooke plant seem to make more progress. They asked questions based on their interactions and experience with Quebecois. This helped motivate the others.

Most of the participants are engineers. Because of the strong correlation between mathematical cognition and language learning, they picked up many of the grammatical rules quickly, sometimes even before they were explained. Unlike most undergraduates, they wanted to be given the grammar rules and complete paradigms. They were uneasy when the instructor wanted to postpone presenting the rules or sought to make only a partial presentation.

Awareness of managerial conditioning

Associates often asked the instructor to reinforce prior information. This desire appears to be related to current management conditioning. This rarely happens in undergraduate college classes. Rather than make a mistake that costs money and may

lead to loss of face as well, managers are conditioned to ask questions all the time—to seek interpretations, opinions and to be aggressive in questioning others for vital data to help them do their jobs right. The embarrassment of asking a seemingly stupid question is small compared to the horror of making a real mistake. The training scenario is no different. Besides being technically oriented, the associates are conditioned by their management routine to learn things as rule processes. Practice bears out the usage of rules, whether for mixing dyes for wallpaper or conjugating ER verbs. This is their paradigm and it works to their advantage as well as to that of the trainer.

Moreover, the managerial ethos also says that "doing one's best" is not good enough. We had to convince the associates that in "imperfect" disciplines such as language study, making mistakes is necessary to learning. Our managers had a hard time accepting making simple errors in the presence of their colleagues. This could be particularly troublesome in classes involving both supervisors and subordinates. Supervisors did not want to make mistakes in front of subordinates; subordinates did not want to upstage supervisors. The instructor had to manage the classroom situation carefully so that supervisors with weaker foreign language skills were not made to look bad in front of others. It was important that all participants be given many opportunities to demonstrate what they had learned and to receive positive reinforcement.

Overall, the associates were concerned that the instructors not lose interest because of the small numbers. They felt guilty about not attending class when professional obligations overwhelmed them. We had to assure them that we were still enthusiastic about the project and had every intention of continuing until the end, and even pursuing additional training for the group.

Flexible instructional delivery structure

Our greatest challenge was dealing with the associates' busy schedules and uncompromising job situations. We had to remain patient and flexible. We proceeded slowly, but still introduced new concepts regularly. We had originally set our objectives based on the pace of a first year college class. This proved to be much too fast, presenting too many grammatical concepts and too much vocabulary. We had to slow the pace and reduce the amount of material we presented, spending more time on review and reworking introduced concepts and vocabulary in different settings. The pace that we settled on was about half that of an elementary college class, i.e., we covered in thirty weeks what college students usually cover in fifteen. This is about the normal high school pace.

During the break between Modules III and IV, Imperial was restructured, so the managers had additional duties and therefore less time. Everyone at Imperial was then doing the work of two or three staff. However, the restructuring also gave the Plattsburgh managers more oversight of the Sherbrooke plant and therefore greater need to improve their ability to communicate with the Quebecois.

Because regular attendance was increasingly a problem, we had to rethink the class structure to make it easier for managers to participate despite busy schedules and increasing responsibilities. We encouraged associates to attend as many sessions as possible. Attendance was not mandatory. We told associates that they should attend whichever sessions they could and that individual mentoring would be available to help them stay on track. The instructor did begin taking attendance, not to put pressure on learners but to help measure training outcomes against stated goals. Since attendance levels have a direct effect on the amount of material covered and the pace of training,

attendance measurement was important to the evaluation of results. We also asked associates to spend more time working with the ancillary materials, particularly the videotape of the *Tandem* television series.

Those who had been absent had a hard time coming back into the group; the gaps in their knowledge made the regulars uneasy, particularly when the absentees were in supervisory positions. As work pressures increased, some of those who expressed interest at the beginning were no longer able to keep up. Having explanations and exercises on diskette or on a website would have been useful. In that way the absentees could have been kept in the class virtually. When they came back to class weeks later, they would only have had a small gap to bridge.

Review of course material

Plant responsibilities and crises often interfered with training session attendance. This was not a problem as long as participants had the means of keeping up with the others and learning the material outside of class. We stressed to participants the importance of learning the material, whether they attended every class or not. If someone was interested in continuing but felt that he was having trouble keeping up, we arranged extra mentoring sessions. We wanted to ensure that the class did not divide into several groups of participants at different proficiency levels.

The associates were delighted to have review sessions. The review sessions did not rehash the week's work, although questions on the week's work were invited. The point of the review is to focus on fundamentals lacking in those who have been away too often and to reinforce those fundamentals in those who had been attending regularly.

Technology, both low-tech and hi-tech

Technology was an important component of our pedagogical approach. We experimented with various technological means of encouraging and facilitating self-pacing and self-correction. Audiocassettes were an essential low-tech component. Participants used them to practice listening comprehension at times when they would normally be listening to the radio, for example in their cars on the way to work. We provided them with tapes of textbook exercises. Audiocassettes of the video soundtrack would also have been helpful.

Video was another important component. One of the authors prepared worksheets that brought what the participants had learned in class to bear upon content of the *Tandem* episodes. Some of the worksheets focused on general comprehension; others developed vocabulary; while still others reviewed specific grammar points. These episodes are rich in both linguistic and cultural content so they can be viewed repeatedly. Since they are not subtitled and meant for a French-speaking Quebec audience, they can be used for all levels of language study, from beginner to advanced.

We considered putting additional material on interactive floppy disks for use on non-networked personal computers. Another possibility would have been to place lesson summaries and self-correcting exercises on a website. Adding audio to such websites greatly increases their usefulness. Both of these techniques could be supplemented with mentoring by e-mail. These technology delivered materials are especially important given the time pressures and constraints of the participants.

EPILOGUE

The managers who completed the on-site French language-training program at Imperial Wallcoverings were pleased with the progress they had made. They felt they had gained a basic understanding of the language. They could speak well enough to communicate with the francophones they met in the course of their work or travel in Quebec and could understand the French that was spoken to them with a little help from their interlocutors. Their reading comprehension increased as well, even though that was not a focus of the program.

In a 1998 article that appeared in the North Country Economic Development Newsletter, Don Lazzaro, Human Resources Manager for the Imperial Home Décor Group, described the difference that this on-site training program made in "helping to develop a stronger bond and more efficient working relationship with [the plant's] Canadian counterparts".

> One of our directors who participated in the pilot language program remarked at how much more relaxed he was visiting the Sherbrook facility after going through the program. The ability to simply exchange common courtesies in French, he noted, did wonders for his working relationship with his Canadian co-workers. They took his attempt to speak their language as a gesture of respect and friendship--and responded in a more positive way from that point on to what he had to say.
>
> The new language skills also did wonders for our staff members who regularly visited the Canadian facility. Simply being able to read bulletin board notices--or a menu at lunchtime--made our people feel more

a part of the entire operation.

[Because the language program was tailored to our product and business language],our production manager was able to talk more clearly and speiically than ever before about our products using French to speak the language of printers, color mixers and production people.

A simple grasp of the language also made it easier for our quality manager to read and interpret memos dealing with product quality and the need to correct specific defects. This made our entire operation more responsive to potential problems and more efficient in making any needed corrections.

One manager even remarked about how the language course helped him better understand his own French-Canadian heritage. (1,7)

Unfortunately, as a result of the restructuring to which we alluded the Plattsburgh plant of Imperial Wallcoverings closed in mid-1999. We hope that the French language and Quebec culture training that the managers received through our program increased their marketability within the cross-border economy of upstate New York.

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